

HELENA VALLEY IRRIGATION DISTRICT

HB 316

Legislative Committee Testimony, January 8, 2011

EXHIBIT 3
DATE Feb. 9, 2011
HB 8

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Jim Foster. I am the Manager of the Helena Valley Irrigation District.

I wish to speak from the perspective of a recipient and on-the-ground user of the RRGL and Irrigation ^{Renewable Resource Grant} ~~Development Program Grants~~. Like many water projects, we are self-funded from landowners, mostly farmers and ranchers and receive no federal, state or county funds. ^{for payroll's budget} The only viable source of revenue that we have found to maintain and upgrade our infrastructure has been grants through the DNRC. We have multi-million dollar projects that are being operated and maintained on budgets that can barely make payroll and standard overhead expenses such as insurances and fuel each year, much less attempt to repair major structures or line canals to save precious water, which ^{benefits the entire community}

Our most recent Renewable Resource Grant lined a portion of our main canal that was estimated by our consulting engineer to save ^{over} ~~an estimated~~ three million gallons of water per day, and that savings will go on for another 50 years. Water we were able to save allowed us ^{to bank into the} through an agreement with agencies and private water ~~right holders the ability to~~ leave water in Prickly Pear Creek which resulted in the first time in forty years, Prickly Pear Creek being a live stream all the way where it empties into Lake Helena. With the water left in-stream, riparian restoration and fisheries have begun. Our irrigation District is involved in several similar projects, and the reason we can engage in multi-purpose endeavors such as these is largely due to improvements to our system due to receiving Renewable Resource ^{and} Irrigation Development Program grants. As a multi-purpose project the work we have accomplished through the grants serves not only our agricultural base, but also 25,000 residents of the City of Helena as we provide them with municipal water. We have extremely important responsibilities to not keep up with maintaining, automating and making more efficient our infrastructure and water use.

Besides working with the RRGL program, we have also successfully worked with the DNRC Irrigation Development Program through Pat Riley. Through this grant program, we were able to obtain the engineering required to modernize and overhaul one of our 3500 hp pump units, and develop a (GIS) Geographic Information System which benefits are far reaching, but include identifying and tracking noxious weed infestations and their control, as well as identifying water system inefficiency locations to help develop a plan for conservation.

In short Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, irrigation projects such as the Helena Valley Irrigation District have limited financial resources and at the same time, huge infrastructure maintenance and water delivery responsibilities. Our water is used to provide water to 18,000 acres of farmland, for the City of Helena's municipal use and numerous fish, wildlife and environmental projects. Please keep fully funding the RRGL and Irrigation Development Program grants. It has proved to be our only reasonable and accessible pool of money to work with, and the projects they finance benefits ^{entire community and state as} a ~~wide range of people~~. It provides for economic development, and a multiplied return of investment to the State.


JAMES A. FOSTER, MANAGER

HELENA VALLEY IRRIGATION DISTRICT

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